

COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS POLICY

Subject

Legislative Policy: Refugee Resettlement Programs

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Purpose

To establish legislative policy guidelines to enhance the ability of the County's Washington and Sacramento legislative representatives to provide timely input to legislators concerning the County's interest in Refugee Resettlement Programs.

Background

The Refugee Act of 1980 (Public Law 96-212) was enacted by Congress on March 17, 1980. The stated objectives of this act "... are to provide a permanent and systematic procedure for the admission to this country of refugees of special humanitarian concern to the United States, and to provide comprehensive and uniform provisions for the effective resettlement and absorption of those refugees who are admitted."

With the passage of this Act, Congress restated its assumption that integration of political refugees into the American culture and economy takes a reasonably short period of time; therefore, the commitment of federal support should only be of limited duration. As a result, Congress limited the federal funding of refugee cash and medical assistance for each refugee to 36 months from the date of entry into the United States. This period was later reduced to 31 months as a cost saving move to meet federal spending limitations posed by the Gramm-Rudman Act. Inadequate federal appropriations have driven administrative policy to further limit refugee cash assistance to 8 months. Despite Congressional intent, responsibility for cash and medical assistance for refugee families has been shifted to states and counties

The Refugee Assistance Amendment of 1982 assures that refugees are not initially placed or resettle in an area highly impacted by the presence of refugees, unless the refugees have spouses, parents, siblings or children in the area, except in unforeseen emergency situations that are justified by grave humanitarian concerns or national interest. Though the Act and Amendment appear to be comprehensive and well conceived, significant loopholes exist to nullify their effectiveness for local governments with regard to fiscal relief and expanded federal responsibilities. As an example, the federal government has not effectively consulted with States and localities concerning the intended distribution of refugees. The Federal government, recognizing a disparity in refugee resettlement, developed a methodology to designate regions of the country as refugee-impacted areas, thus qualifying these regions for targeted assistance funding. The County of San Diego has been designated by the Federal government as a refugee-impacted area since 1983.

The federal government has failed to adequately fund the program mandated by the Refugee Act of 1980. The limited resources for refugee programs have adversely affected

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the ability of local governments to meet local costs. All local costs for supporting refugees should be fully offset by the federal government.

Reference

Public Law 96-212; Board action on June 16, 1981 (173) which adopted the County Master Plan on Refugee Resettlement with specific recommendations.

Policy

It shall be the legislative policy of the County of San Diego with regard to refugee resettlement to urge the Congress and federal government, including the Office of Refugee Resettlement/Health and Human Services, the Department of State, and the Justice Department to:

Planning and Coordination

1. Continue to support a federal planning process to produce a national plan of resettlement for future mass arrivals of refugees, utilizing input from the states, large counties and major cities;
2. Support coordination with all government and voluntary agencies to ensure that refugee resettlement in San Diego County is limited to family reunification cases.
3. Limit the annual admission of political refugees to the number of refugees allowed under the Refugee Act of 1980, Refugee Assistance Amendment of 1982, not to exceed 50,000.

Funding

4. Support provision of 100% federal reimbursement of expenses incurred by local agencies engaged in the refugee resettlement efforts;
5. Support inclusion of time expired refugees and secondary migrants in all funding formulas;
6. Support provision of incentive funding to localities for those programs which successfully integrate refugees into the local economy and thereby remove them from public assistance rolls;
7. Support distribution of federal assistance funds based on the location in which the refugee or secondary migrant resides rather than the point of initial resettlement.
8. Support provision of continued funding for targeted assistance programs to reduce welfare dependency and increase self-sufficiency among refugees in refugee-impacted areas.

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9. Oppose provision of priority service, eligibility advantages, or higher benefit levels for refugees over similar assistance programs available to U.S. citizens.

Health and Education Services

10. Support provision of health screening of newly arriving refugees to minimize communicable disease exposure and identify chronic health problems requiring long-term medical care and to evaluate health barriers to employment;

11. Support appropriation of additional Federal funds for health and bi-lingual services to local institutions (e.g., school districts, hospitals, and police departments) impacted by increases in refugee clients;

12. Support expansion of funding for mental health programs, and family support services and community development.

Employment Services

13. Support all proposals to promote early employment, including Vocational English-as-a-Second Language (VESL)/English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) programs and short-term employment training;

14. Support all proposals to improve corporate relationships to facilitate refugee employment opportunities in private industry.

15. Support all proposals to encourage and enable effective and efficient coordination of refugee services.

16. Support all efforts and maximize the use of voluntary non-profit organizations and agencies to achieve the goal of economic self-sufficiency and effective resettlement for refugees residing in San Diego County.

Responsible Departments

1. Department of Social Services 2. Chief Administrative Officer 3. Department of Health Services

Sunset Date This policy will be reviewed for continuance by 1-1-02.

References B/S Action 3-16-77 (16) B/S Action 7-15-81 (6) B/S Action 12-11-84 (21)
B/S Action 3-1-88 (106) B/S Action 6-18-95 B/S Action 1-9-96 (4)